

New Protections in Place for Safe Prescribing of Opiates

DOVER – As of April 1, new regulations are now in effect that will aid doctors and pharmacists in the fight against misuse and over-prescription of opioid medications in Delaware.

The new requirements contain expanded procedures related to prescribing opiates for acute episodes as well as for chronic, long-term pain management. Some components are at the discretion of the prescribing provider while other requirements are situation-based.

The result of an 18-month rulemaking process that included input from medical professionals, public health experts, the Attorney General, and other stakeholders, the requirements are administered by the Division of Professional Regulation – the state agency charged with regulating medical practice and drug prescription.

Gov. John Carney reiterated the state's commitment to combating the opioid epidemic on all fronts in an address to a joint session of the General Assembly last week. Delaware has the nation's fifth highest rate of overall opioid sales.

"A major impediment to families being stable and successful is the opioid crisis plaguing our state and country...And in too many cases opioid abuse contributes to our state's tragic heroin problem," Gov. Carney said. "These new regulations will be some of the most far-reaching in the nation."

"These regulations are an important piece of our state's effort to combat opioid abuse and heroin addiction," said Secretary of State Jeffrey Bullock, whose department houses the Division of Professional Regulation. "Many users of heroin have told us that their battles with addiction started when they were prescribed opiates for valid medical needs."

Key elements of the new regulations are aimed at controlling the amount of opiates given to new patients and aggressively monitoring their treatment. First-time opiate prescriptions for acute cases may not exceed a one week supply under the new rules. If further opiate prescriptions are deemed necessary, further action is required, including a physical exam with discussion of relevant patient history and the risks of opiates, and a check of the statewide Prescription Monitoring Program database.

Prescribers statewide have received an overview of the new regulations and have been directed to consult HelpIsHereDE.com, which contains educational materials about identifying and fighting addiction, sample forms, and a link to access the Prescription Monitoring Program.